

## MISERY LOVES COMPANY: AN INVESTIGATION OF COUPLES' INTERROLE CONFLICT CONGRUENCE

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**Previous research on interrole (family-to-work and work-to-family) conflict has demonstrated that such conflict is detrimental for outcomes in the work and home domains for employees and their family members. Although research has begun to integrate multiple parties into the interrole conflict literature, studies have overlooked how employee interrole conflict and partner interrole conflict can jointly influence employee outcomes. We advance work-family research by integrating balance theory with the interrole conflict literature to investigate dyadic interrole conflict congruence and challenge the implicit assumption that less interrole conflict always results in superior outcomes. Using a polynomial regression analysis of 141 employee and romantic partner dyads, we demonstrate that congruence between couples' experiences of family-to-work (but not work-to-family) conflict is positively associated with balance satisfaction, and ultimately employee job satisfaction and partner relationship satisfaction. Thus, when it comes to balance satisfaction and its downstream correlates, the harmful effects of high family-to-work conflict (FWC) are largely mitigated if an employee's partner shares a similarly high level of FWC, and the beneficial effects of low FWC are largely eliminated if an employee's partner does not share a similarly low level of FWC.**

Issues related to work and family continue to receive attention globally; for example, the vast majority of countries around the world now have laws concerning paid parental leave (Deahl, 2016), and some nations hold summits on working families (Holst, 2014). Similarly, research devoted to the intersection of work and family continues to flourish, including key constructs such as interrole conflict (e.g., Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, & Rosenthal, 1964). The bidirectional approach to interrole conflict outlines two related, yet distinct, forms: family-to-work conflict (FWC) and

work-to-family conflict (WFC) (Netemeyer, Boles, & McMurrian, 1996). FWC occurs when time spent on or general demands and strain created by the family interfere with performing one's job, and WFC occurs when demands and strain from, or time consumed by, work interfere with family responsibilities (Netemeyer et al., 1996). Previous research and reviews focused on findings from individual employees have concluded that negative relationships exist between interrole conflict and organizational commitment, job satisfaction, life satisfaction, health, and work performance (Frone, Yardley, & Markel, 1997; Kossek & Ozeki, 1998; Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2005; Netemeyer et al., 1996). However, because researchers (and likely many practitioners) often simplistically view greater interrole conflict as always being more

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detrimental for work and family outcomes, new research that challenges this conventional wisdom is particularly important to provide nuanced insights to help employed couples and families.

Recently, literature devoted to interrole conflict has expanded to include the perspectives of couples and significant others (SO),<sup>1</sup> in addition to focal employee perceptions, which is consistent with family systems theory (Hammer, Bauer, & Grandey, 2003; Hammer, Neal, Newsom, Brockwood, & Colton, 2005). While such research has emphasized the value of studying interrole conflict within the broader system or social context employees work and live within (i.e., work and home) (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Kossek, 2015), these studies have typically examined SO ratings of the *focal employee's* conflict-related experiences and ignored the SO's *own* conflict (e.g., Ilies, Schwind, Wagner, Johnson, DeRue, & Ilgen, 2007; Wayne, Casper, Matthews, & Allen, 2013). Thus, they have overlooked the dyadic interplay between both partners' experiences of work–family conflict. In order to capture a more complete understanding of couples' family context, as family systems theory would advocate (Hammer et al., 2003), we aim to examine couples' work–family conflict experiences at the couple- or dyad level. This approach is in line with Casper, Eby, Bordeaux, Lockwood, and Lambert's (2007) recommendation to consider levels of analysis other than the individual, given that nearly 90% of work–family research has been conducted at the individual level.

The present research offers a new perspective by specifically examining dyadic interrole conflict congruence (i.e., congruence in terms of the similarity in levels of WFC or FWC for dyad members—in this case, employee and SO). Distinct from the crossover literature, which has investigated one type of dyadic effect (i.e., a partner effect involving the crossover or contagion of stress across individuals [see Gooty & Yammarino, 2011; Westman, 2002]), we study how employee interrole conflict and SO interrole conflict can jointly or *simultaneously* influence outcomes (i.e., a mutual influence effect [see Gooty & Yammarino, 2011]). In other words, both individuals in a couple may concurrently struggle, neither may struggle, or only one member may struggle to fulfill work and family demands. An example of FWC congruence would be when both members of a couple experience interruptions at work due to various family-related

responsibilities, such as one member being the primary daycare contact who often receives a call at the office when a child is sick, while the other is the main contact for the assisted living facility and is called when elder care responsibilities arise for an aging parent. Alternatively, an example of incongruence would involve one partner being the primary contact for their child and parent and the one who receives phone calls in both situations, while the other partner does not experience interruptions at work.

When predicting the effects of various combinations of employees' conflict levels and SOs' conflict levels, two outcomes seem possible. On one hand, the current consensus in the literature is that less conflict is generally good and more conflict is generally bad. A generalization of this consensus would suggest that average levels of conflict among couples will be the primary driver of outcomes. On the other hand, arguments grounded in balance theory (Heider, 1958) would propose that it is also important that couples share the load in terms of the degree to which the family (work) role infringes upon each member's work (family) role (i.e., family members desire equivalent levels of interrole conflict in either direction). In this article, we take the latter position, which challenges the current consensus that less conflict always results in superior outcomes, and demonstrate that the outcomes of an individual's own level of interrole conflict vary based on the level of interrole conflict his or her SO experiences. We rely on balance theory (Heider, 1958) as our overarching theoretical framework, which highlights that individuals strive to maintain a state of balance in their lives, especially in interpersonal relations (Heider, 1958). This theory suggests that states of balance, in this case partners' similarity in interrole conflict, promote harmony and satisfaction, whereas states of imbalance promote disharmony and tension. At the extreme, we posit that it may be the case that it is more satisfying for an employee and an SO to both experience a high level of interrole conflict (and both manage high workloads, for example) rather than to have only one party experience high conflict and the other party experience low conflict.

Integrating balance theory principles with family systems theory's focus on the broader family context (including the couple) as a source for understanding attitudes of members within a family, we explore the focal employee's balance satisfaction as a proximal outcome of the interplay between employee and SO levels of interrole conflict. Balance satisfaction refers to the overall level of satisfaction an individual feels

<sup>1</sup>The present research investigates couples, which include two SOs or partners who share a romantic relationship.

in regard to his or her success at fulfilling both work and family demands (Valcour, 2007). Importantly, satisfaction with balance does not indicate directionality (e.g., from work-to-family or family-to-work) and is holistic in nature (Valcour, 2007), allowing for a broader view of employees' evaluations concerning the intersection between work and family. This more global assessment of work and family is particularly relevant in the present research given our focus on the family context as a whole (i.e., both working partners' interrole conflict experiences). In terms of more distal outcomes, we focus on job satisfaction and SO relationship satisfaction because of their relevance to the conflict literature (Eby, Casper, Lockwood, Bordeaux, & Brinley, 2005; Frone et al., 1997; Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2005) and balance theory (Heider, 1958; Korman, 1970), as well as their attitudinal compatibility with balance satisfaction (see Wayne, Butts, Casper, & Allen, 2017).

Overall, the simultaneous examination of employee and SO interrole conflict holds several notable theoretical contributions. First, we expand theory on work and family by introducing the notion of dyadic interrole conflict congruence. This perspective extends beyond the existing focus on individual-level conflict, to advance a dyadic approach involving congruence in partners' interrole conflict. Dyadic research has appeared rarely in the work and family literature (Casper et al., 2007), yet these investigations can help provide important theoretical insights. Indeed, our theory and results demonstrate that the consideration of employee and SO interrole conflict congruence challenges many individual-level conflict assumptions and findings. Following this, second, we refine theory on interrole conflict by specifying a critical boundary condition (i.e., the SO's conflict). That is, the present study offers new insights regarding whether low interrole conflict really is always the best case scenario for employees when one takes into account employees' family members. Specifically, an SO's interrole conflict provides relevant information that may frame the employee's own experience of interrole conflict and hold implications for employee outcomes. This idea is consistent with the family systems theory tenet that we can learn more if we study the experiences of family members, "than if we simply study each family member individually" (Hammer et al., 2003: 423). Finally, we contribute to research on the relationship between interrole conflict and work-family balance by showing that congruence between partners matters for judgments concerning employee balance satisfaction, beyond

simply the level of conflict experienced by employees. The nature of this relationship has been somewhat elusive, with studies reaching differing conclusions (Greenhaus & Allen, 2011), and the current research suggests this may be a result of the complexity of the relationship—namely, the need to consider SOs' conflict as a key contextual factor. These novel dyadic interrole conflict congruence findings pertaining to employee balance satisfaction, and ultimately well-being at work and at home, enhance our understanding of interrole conflict and hold important implications for organizations and families.

## THEORY AND HYPOTHESES

Family systems theory highlights the importance of the family context for understanding an individual's behavior in the family and work roles (Hammer et al., 2003). This perspective proposes that attitudes and behaviors are significantly influenced by family members' attitudes and behaviors (Hammer et al., 2005), which suggests that employees will be affected by their SOs' interrole conflict experiences. In order to explain the specific manner in which an employee may be impacted by his or her SO's conflict, we turn to balance theory. Heider (1958) posited that individuals strive to maintain balanced states. A balanced state refers to "a harmonious state, one in which the entities comprising the situation and the feelings about them fit together without stress" (Heider, 1958: 180). Entities include objects an individual owns or uses, something produced as a result of an individual's actions (e.g., a poem), or other people (Heider, 1958). Hence, a balanced state involves associated entities (those that belong together) and consistent sentiments (aligned feelings, attitudes, or evaluative responses toward entities) (Crano & Cooper, 1973; Heider, 1958). A core tenet of balance theory is that people prefer balanced states and that imbalance produces tension or feelings of disturbance and pressure for change.

In terms of entities, balance theory proposes that different types of entity relationships can form. Importantly, Heider (1958) provided a key example—members of a family. This suggests that SOs comprise a unit, or entity relationship, and that individuals prefer such relationships to develop and maintain a balanced or harmonious state. The experienced sentiments within such units include individuals' feelings toward each other (e.g., liking the other person) and also individuals' evaluations regarding impersonal entities (e.g., attitudes toward objects and actions in the environment). In our context,

interrole conflict is the impersonal entity against which sentiments are drawn. Sentiments are influenced by a variety of situations, behaviors, and emotions, and the relationship between entity relations and sentiments in balance theory is stated as follows: “we tend to like people who have the same beliefs and attitudes as we have, and when we like people, we want them to have the same attitudes we have” (Heider, 1958: 195). Altogether, a balanced state occurs when partners in a committed relationship (associated entities) hold similar views related to making sacrifices for work or family and experience congruent levels of WFC or FWC (consistent sentiments). Incongruence in conflict would represent an unbalanced state where the employee experiences tension and disturbance (Heider, 1958), which may result in negative implications for this individual both at home and at work. In summary, grounded in balance theory, the present research explores whether the interplay between employees’ own and their SOs’ own interrole conflict will impact various attitudinal outcomes (e.g., satisfaction-related outcomes).

### **Balance Theory, Interrole Congruence, and Balance Satisfaction**

Using the core balance theory tenet that balance results in satisfaction (Heider, 1958), we first posit that interrole conflict congruence will result in satisfaction with work–family balance, also known as balance satisfaction (Valcour, 2007; Wayne et al., 2017). In other words, we posit that as interrole conflict congruence increases in couples—i.e., moves from more incongruent conditions (e.g., one member of the couple has higher interrole conflict than the other) toward more congruent conditions (e.g., both members have similar levels of low or high interrole conflict)—employees will experience higher levels of balance satisfaction. Conversely, as interrole conflict congruence decreases in couples—i.e., moves from more congruent conditions (e.g., both members have similar levels of low or high interrole conflict) toward more incongruent conditions (e.g., one member of the couple has higher interrole conflict than the other)—employees’ balance satisfaction should decrease.

Balance theory suggests that an implicit goal of interpersonal relationships is to achieve a balance in sentiments (Treadway, Ferris, Duke, Adams, & Thatcher, 2007). At the dyadic level, Heider (1958: 202) postulated that “a dyad is balanced if the relations between two entities are all positive. . . or all negative. . . disharmony results when relations of different signs exist.” Newcomb (1953) stressed the

advantages of symmetry between two individuals’ points of view regarding a target, and he assumed that people experience a consistent “strain toward symmetry.” If dyads do not experience balance or congruence in their experiences (of interrole conflict), then tension and the desire for change will result (Heider, 1958). In other words, couples want symmetry in the sacrifices each individual makes for their work or family, and, for example, when family demands or obligations only infringe on one party’s work, imbalance creates tension and dissatisfaction.

We focus on employees’ satisfaction with balance as our proximal outcome of interest, which is defined as an attitude that refers to the “overall level of contentment resulting from an assessment of one’s degree of success at meeting work and family role demands” (Valcour, 2007: 1512). The present focus on dyads or both partners’ interrole conflict is important as perceptions of balance satisfaction are formed through complex interactions between environmental and psychosocial factors (Grawitch, Maloney, Barber, & Mooshegian, 2013). This suggests that the configuration of the couple’s interrole conflict experiences may represent a key factor in employees’ balance satisfaction perceptions.

Interrole conflict congruence represents a balanced state where similar sentiments exist between an employee and his or her SO in relation to interference between work and family roles. An advantage of similarity in views is that it provides validation for one’s own cognitive orientation toward an entity (Heider, 1958; Newcomb, 1953). Therefore, in a state of interrole conflict congruence, employees’ own decisions related to work and family are validated by their SOs’ conflict. Take, for instance, a condition where an employee experiences high WFC. If an SO also experiences high WFC, the employee may feel justified in his or her efforts within the work and family domains given that his or her SO demonstrates similar challenges in meeting both work and family demands. Furthermore, in this situation, the person’s own resource allocation decisions toward work and family are validated by his or her SO’s resource allocations, which is important as balance satisfaction involves “the general feeling that resources are being allocated appropriately” (Grawitch et al., 2013: 278). Conversely, when an employee experiences high WFC and his or her SO experiences low WFC, this results in an imbalanced state where tension is felt by the employee (Heider, 1958). Thus, this individual may question his or her resource allocation between work and family, diminishing feelings of balance satisfaction (Valcour, 2007).

These ideas are aligned with notions concerning the importance of congruence, or fit, between an employee and his or her work and family environments for achieving work–family balance (Voydanoff, 2005). In particular, interrole conflict congruence may indicate a good fit between an employee and the family environment in that the individual is attending to and coping with work and family demands in a similar fashion as his or her SO. In terms of work demands and WFC, Barnett, Gareis, and Brennan (1999) argued that working long hours is not necessarily problematic if it meets the preferences of the family and the greater work–family system that the employee lives within. Additionally, in the case of high interrole conflict, individuals may feel relief or comfort when their SOs are similarly struggling to meet work and family demands (i.e., misery loves company). Further support for the positive implications of interrole conflict congruence for balance satisfaction can be found in Korman's (1970) proposal that individuals will find satisfying those roles that maximize their sense of balance or consistency. As such, we propose that as the congruence between two partners' experiences of interrole conflict increases, the focal employee will perceive higher balance satisfaction.

*Hypothesis 1a. The more congruence between an employee's level of FWC and an SO's level of FWC, the more satisfied the employee is with his or her work–family balance.*

*Hypothesis 1b. The more congruence between an employee's level of WFC and an SO's level of WFC, the more satisfied the employee is with his or her work–family balance.*

### **Differentiating Types of Interrole Conflict Congruence**

Having considered the effects of varying degrees of interrole conflict congruence—i.e., moving from more incongruent conditions (e.g., one member of the couple has higher interrole conflict than the other) toward more congruent conditions (e.g., both members have similar levels of low or high interrole conflict) and vice-versa—we now focus on examining the different types of congruence and incongruence. First, we focus on conditions of interrole conflict congruence, making predictions for changes in employee balance satisfaction as couples move from similar levels of low interrole conflict to similar levels of high interrole conflict. Indeed, we expect congruence (between employees and SOs) at lower levels of interrole conflict to result in higher balance

satisfaction than congruence (between employees and SOs) at higher levels of interrole conflict.

Although balance is generally preferred to imbalance (Heider, 1958), we propose that distinctions also exist between couples who possess congruent interrole conflict based on the level of conflict. The interrole conflict literature, including meta-analytic reviews, has demonstrated a consistent, negative relationship between conflict and satisfaction judgments (e.g., job satisfaction, life satisfaction, relationship satisfaction and family satisfaction) (Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2005; Netemeyer et al., 1996; Shockley & Singla, 2011). These established negative relationships are theorized to occur because interrole conflict is based on the notion that participation in the work (family) role becomes more difficult by virtue of participation in the family (work) role (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985), and this difficulty or struggle to participate in both roles is expected to be stressful and dissatisfying based on role conflict theory (Kahn et al., 1964). Additionally, a study by Grawitch and colleagues (2013) found a negative relationship between interrole conflict and satisfaction with work–life balance. Following the expansive literature on the relationships between interrole conflict and satisfaction judgments, the preceding hypothesis, as well as Valcour's (2007) assumption that people who perceive low conflict between work and family feel satisfied and successful at managing work and family demands, we hypothesize that congruence (between employees and SOs) at low levels of interrole conflict will result in higher focal employee balance satisfaction compared to congruence (between employees and SOs) at high levels of interrole conflict.

*Hypothesis 2a. Employee balance satisfaction is higher when an employee and an SO are congruent at a low level of FWC than when an employee and an SO are congruent at a high level of FWC.*

*Hypothesis 2b. Employee balance satisfaction is higher when an employee and an SO are congruent at a low level of WFC than when an employee and an SO are congruent at a high level of WFC.*

### **Differentiating Types of Interrole Conflict Incongruence**

After conceptually examining the effects of varying degrees of interrole conflict congruence, and having considered different types of congruence (e.g., moving from similar levels of low interrole conflict to similar levels of high interrole conflict),

we now explore the different types of incongruence. Specifically, we focus on changes in the focal employee's balance satisfaction as couples move from focal employees having higher levels of interrole conflict than SOs to SOs having higher levels of interrole conflict than focal employees. In general, we expect incongruence to have more of a negative influence on employee balance satisfaction when an employee has a higher level of interrole conflict than an SO, compared to when an SO has a higher level of interrole conflict than an employee.

Bowler and Brass (2006) described unbalanced states as asymmetric relationships within dyads, and in our case these occur when partners have incongruent or dissimilar interrole conflict experiences. This includes both situations in which an employee experiences higher levels of conflict than his or her SO and situations in which an employee experiences lower levels of conflict than his or her SO. To distinguish between these two unbalanced states, we turn to another tenet of balance theory; namely, that when one likes another person, one prefers to receive benefits and not harm from the person (Heider, 1958). In the instance where employee interrole conflict is lower than SO conflict, the employee should feel that he or she is benefiting from the sacrifices that the SO is making for work or family. This situation is aligned with Hammer Allen, and Grigsby's (1997) logic that "individuals who are highly involved in their family will have partners who experience lower levels of work-family conflict" (190). We argue that the employee likely feels grateful that he or she is able to meet work and family demands (and not combat interrole conflict) thanks to his or her SO's efforts, which should increase the employee's contentment with meeting role demands (i.e., satisfaction with balance).

On the other hand, when the employee experiences higher interrole conflict compared to his or her SO, the employee may feel harmed in the sense that the SO is not sharing in the family responsibilities, and as a result, the employee's work is being hindered while the SO's is not (in the case of FWC). Previous research has suggested that individuals in dual-earner relationships who perform a significant proportion of the housework (compared to their spouses) have lower perceptions of fairness regarding their housework allocation arrangement compared to individuals who share housework with their dual-earner partners (Mederer, 1993). Based on balance theory arguments, we expect this to lead to feeling harmed and dissatisfied. In terms of WFC, the employee may feel harmed because his or her

performance in the family is hindered by work, while his or her SO's work is not interfering with family responsibilities. Such differences may create negative sentiments—for example, feelings of competition, jealousy, or envy (Heider, 1958)—which we expect will decrease the employee's balance satisfaction.

The notion that an unbalanced state is more detrimental for an employee's balance satisfaction when the individual experiences higher rather than lower interrole conflict compared to his or her SO aligns with the basic premise that bad, harmful, and unpleasant situations in interpersonal relationships have a stronger impact on people than good, desirable, or beneficial ones (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, & Vohs, 2001). Baumeister and colleagues (2001) reviewed studies showing that, in couples, negative behaviors, destructive patterns, and distress hold greater implications for outcomes than positive behaviors, constructive patterns, and positive relations do. Extending this, and following our arguments above, we expect an employee who is experiencing greater levels of interrole conflict than his or her SO to feel harmed and distressed in the relationship, and, consequently, for this unbalanced state to be more problematic for the employee's balance satisfaction than an unbalanced situation where the employee benefits through lower interrole conflict compared to his or her SO. Thus, we hypothesize the following:

*Hypothesis 3a. Employee balance satisfaction is lower when an employee has a higher level of FWC than an SO as compared to when an SO has a higher level of FWC than an employee.*

*Hypothesis 3b. Employee balance satisfaction is lower when an employee has a higher level of WFC than an SO as compared to when an SO has a higher level of WFC than an employee.*

### **Distal Outcomes of Interrole Conflict Congruence via Balance Satisfaction**

Thus far, we have focused on balance satisfaction as our proximal outcome of employee and SO congruence in interrole conflict. Next, we consider more distal outcomes of the interplay between employee and SO conflict. Previous research has demonstrated that interrole conflict is linked with individuals' and their SOs' well-being (Allen, Herst, Bruck, & Sutton, 2000; Cowlshaw, Evans, & McLennan, 2010; Desrochers, Sargent, & Hostetler, 2012; Ford, Heinen, & Langkamer, 2007). Well-being includes specific satisfaction judgments, such as job and

marital satisfaction, in addition to general or global life satisfaction (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999). Given its aforementioned holistic nature, Valcour (2007) stated that balance satisfaction may play an especially useful role in work–family models as an intervening variable between antecedents and outcomes. Therefore, we examine balance satisfaction as a mediating factor between interrole conflict congruence and the outcomes of employee job satisfaction (in the work domain) and SO relationship satisfaction (in the family domain).

Valcour (2007) explained that balance satisfaction occurs when employees feel they have sufficient resources to successfully respond to demands stemming from their work and family roles. Sufficient resources and success in both domains should positively impact family members' assessments of the relationship they share with employees. For instance, recent research has suggested that husbands' work–family enrichment, which involves resource gain and improved participation across one's work and family roles, is positively associated with wives' marital satisfaction (van Steenbergen, Kluwer, & Karney, 2014). On the other hand, when employees are not successful in both roles (i.e., leading to lower balance satisfaction), employees may not be able "to contribute to family activities, and the family members are likely to experience a reduction in the quality of the family experience" (Carlson, Ferguson, Perrewe, & Whitten, 2011: 943). This line of reasoning should result in lower SO assessments of relationship satisfaction with the employee following low employee balance satisfaction. In summary, we conclude that employee balance satisfaction, which includes satisfaction with one's accomplishments in his or her family role, is expected to be positively related to SO relationship satisfaction. Hence, these two satisfaction judgments, or distinguishable sentiments, are "alike in sign" and encompass a harmonious or balanced state (Heider, 1958: 182).

Moreover, balance theory suggests that employees' sentiments, or feelings, about work and family may adapt to achieve a more balanced state. In a situation of low balance satisfaction, balance theory would suggest that tension exists if an individual claims to be satisfied with his or her family (work) but cannot allocate sufficient resources toward family (work). However, if one changes his or her sentiments about the entity, this produces more of a balanced state (Heider, 1958). For instance, an employee who is unable to dedicate sufficient resources to work may disengage from his or her work and profess not to be satisfied with his or her job, as

less engagement at work relates to less job satisfaction (Rich, LePine, & Crawford, 2010). This condition of two negative relations (i.e., insufficient resources to dedicate to work along with proclaiming dissatisfaction with one's job) would restore an overall balanced state for the employee (Heider, 1958). In other words, we expect employees with low balance satisfaction to experience decreased job satisfaction in order to maintain a balanced state. Following Wayne and colleagues' (2017) argument that greater balance satisfaction is associated with "other positive feelings and cognitions toward one's organization" (14), which we extend to one's job, we propose that balance satisfaction is positively related to job satisfaction.

Some empirical evidence exists for linkages between balance satisfaction and satisfaction in the work and family domains. For example, previous research has supported positive relationships between different domain attitudes, such as family, job, and life distress, as well as job and life satisfaction (e.g., Adams, King, & King, 1996; Grandey & Cropanzano, 1999). Additionally, multiple studies have found support for a positive relationship between balance satisfaction and both job and family satisfaction (Grawitch et al., 2013; Wayne et al., 2017). Altogether, these findings and our previous theorizing suggest that balance satisfaction is a mechanism through which the positive effects of interrole conflict congruence bring about higher satisfaction in the work and family domains. Thus, we hypothesize the following:

*Hypothesis 4a. Employee balance satisfaction mediates the relationship between the interplay of employee and SO FWC and employee job satisfaction.*

*Hypothesis 4b. Employee balance satisfaction mediates the relationship between the interplay of employee and SO WFC and employee job satisfaction.*

*Hypothesis 5a. Employee balance satisfaction mediates the relationship between the interplay of employee and SO FWC and SO relationship satisfaction.*

*Hypothesis 5b. Employee balance satisfaction mediates the relationship between the interplay of employee and SO WFC and SO relationship satisfaction.*

## METHODS

### Participants and Procedure

Participants in this study were government employees working for a Midwestern state in the United States. To recruit participants, we sent an e-mail to

an employee listserv that included approximately 18,000 members (out of the approximately 321,000 total government employees in this state). The recruitment e-mail detailed the requirements for participation (working full-time and living with a spouse or significant other) and included a link to the registration page and an initial online survey. The study instructions noted that respondents would be entered into a draw for 30 Visa gift cards as an incentive for participation. After sending out our request, we closed the initial survey once we had received just under 250 sign-ups (specifically, 242 completed surveys). This initial focal employee survey asked for work-related (FWC and job satisfaction) and demographic information. Focal employees were then mailed a paper survey at the home address they provided and asked to complete WFC and balance satisfaction measures. To serve as an additional data source, these focal employees were asked to recruit their SO. Approximately one week after the focal employee completed the initial survey, their SO was mailed a separate SO survey. The SO survey included measures of their own FWC, their own WFC,<sup>2</sup> their own relationship satisfaction, and focal employee job satisfaction.

Because our study focused on the interplay of employee conflict and SO conflict, only participants who had an SO complete a survey were retained. A total of 242 respondents completed the initial focal employee survey, of which 168 completed the mailed survey. Of these 168 employees, 141 comprised the final sample that could be matched with an SO survey (overall retention rate of 58.3%). Focal employees held jobs in a variety of professions, including information technology, public relations, and social services. A total of 70% of respondents in the final sample were women, 92.2% were married, and 59.6% had children. Independent sample t-tests comparing individuals who completed only the initial survey to those who were retained in our

analyses revealed no significant differences on the demographic variables just discussed.<sup>3</sup>

## Measures

Unless otherwise noted, participants responded using a Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree.

**FWC and WFC.** Focal employees, as well as SOs, each rated their own FWC and WFC by completing the four-item measures from Gutek, Searle, and Klepa (1991). An example FWC item is, "My personal demands are so great that it takes away from my work." The coefficient  $\alpha$  for employee FWC was .77. The coefficient  $\alpha$  for SO FWC was .76. An example WFC item is, "My work takes up time that I'd like to spend with family [and] friends." The coefficient  $\alpha$  for employee WFC was .75. The coefficient  $\alpha$  for SO WFC was .78.

**Balance satisfaction.** Focal employees rated their balance satisfaction using the five-item satisfaction with work–family balance scale developed by Valcour (2007). Participants were presented with the stem "Indicate your level of satisfaction with. . ." (using a scale ranging from 1 = very dissatisfied to 5 = very satisfied). An example item is, "the way you divide your time between work and personal or family life." The coefficient  $\alpha$  for this scale was .94.

**Job satisfaction.** Focal employees, as well as SOs, both rated employee job satisfaction using a five-item version of Brayfield and Rothe's (1951) job satisfaction scale (Judge & Ilies, 2004). Consistent with Judge and Hulin (1993), as well as Judge, Locke, Durham, and Kluger (1998), in order to alleviate concerns over common method bias when assessing various forms of satisfaction (i.e., balance satisfaction and job satisfaction), we chose to collect employee and SO reports of job satisfaction. Judge and Hulin (1993) and Judge et al. (1998) noted that SOs are ideal sources for reporting on employee job satisfaction because they know the focal employee better than anyone else.

<sup>2</sup> We chose to focus on focal employee ratings of employee FWC or WFC and SO ratings of SO FWC or WFC for both theoretical and empirical reasons. In terms of theory, we drew from recent applications of balance theory in top-tier management journals (e.g., Bowler & Brass, 2006; Lau & Liden, 2008; Sherony & Green, 2002)—all of which assessed at least one of the constructs central to balance theory predictions from another source. In terms of empirical reasons, we chose focal employee ratings of employee conflict and SO ratings of SO conflict to alleviate concerns over common method variance (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003).

<sup>3</sup> We also conducted paired samples t-tests to examine whether differences in levels of FWC and WFC existed between the full-time government focal employees and their SOs. For FWC, there were no statistically significant differences (mean difference = .08,  $t[140] = 1.16$ , n.s.) between focal employees (mean = 2.05,  $SD = .65$ ) and SOs (mean = 1.97,  $SD = .63$ ). For WFC, there were no statistically significant differences (mean difference = .14,  $t[140] = 1.45$ , n.s.) between focal employees (mean = 3.12,  $SD = .85$ ) and SOs (mean = 2.99,  $SD = .87$ ).



A sample employee-rated item is, “Most days I am enthusiastic about my work.” A sample SO-rated item is, “Most days my spouse/significant other is enthusiastic about his or her work.” The coefficient  $\alpha$  for this scale was .88 for employees and .91 for SOs. Importantly, employee and SO ratings of job satisfaction were strongly correlated at .66 ( $p < .01$ ), and the conclusions drawn for the study hypotheses were the same using either source. As such, in order to alleviate concerns over common method variance we present the results for SO reports.

**Relationship satisfaction.** SOs rated their own marital or relationship satisfaction using the five-item scale developed by Norton (1983). An example item is “Our marriage or relationship has been very strong.” The coefficient  $\alpha$  for this scale was .94.

**Controls.** Following past work–family research (e.g., Aryee, Srinivas, & Tan, 2005), number of children was included as a control variable. Additionally, gender was included as a control variable because it has been meta-analytically associated with FWC and WFC (Byron, 2005) and has also been associated with balance satisfaction (Valcour, 2007). Finally, we included marital status as a control variable because our sample included some unmarried couples living together. Following recent recommendations regarding control variables (Becker, 2005), we ran our analyses with and without these control variables and the conclusions drawn for the study hypotheses were consistent across both sets of analyses.

## Analysis

Following recent recommendations from Krasikova and LeBreton (2012) to model dyadic theoretical phenomena using dyadic analytic techniques, we considered all of our constructs at the dyad level and used polynomial regression and response surface methodology to test Hypotheses 1–3 (Edwards, 2002; Edwards & Parry, 1993). Specifically, the mediator variable (employee balance satisfaction) was regressed on the control variables (gender, number of children, and marital status) as well as the five polynomial terms (for FWC,  $b_1$  employee FWC,  $b_2$  SO FWC,  $b_3$  employee FWC<sup>2</sup>,  $b_4$  employee FWC  $\times$  SO FWC,  $b_5$  SO FWC<sup>2</sup>; for WFC,  $b_1$  employee WFC,  $b_2$  SO WFC,  $b_3$  employee WFC<sup>2</sup>,  $b_4$  employee WFC  $\times$  SO WFC,  $b_5$  SO WFC<sup>2</sup>). In other words, we estimated this equation (to simplify, we omitted all control variables):

$$B = b_0 + b_1E + b_2S + b_3E^2 + b_4(ES) + b_5S^2 + e \quad (1)$$

where  $B$  represents employee balance satisfaction,  $E$  represents employee FWC or WFC, and  $S$  represents SO FWC or WFC. We mean-centered employee FWC or WFC ( $E$ ) and SO FWC or WFC ( $S$ ) before calculating the three second-order polynomial terms in order to eliminate nonessential multicollinearity and facilitate the interpretation of results (Aiken & West, 1991). Consistent with past research using polynomial regression (for examples, see Edwards & Cable, 2009; Lambert, Tepper, Carr, Holt, & Barelka, 2012; Matta, Scott, Koopman, & Conlon, 2015), we used the coefficients from the above equation to plot a three-dimensional response surface, with the perpendicular axes corresponding to values for employee FWC or WFC ( $E$ ) and SO FWC or WFC ( $S$ ), and the vertical axis corresponding to values for employee balance satisfaction (Edwards & Parry, 1993).<sup>4</sup>

To test Hypotheses 1 and 2, we followed the criteria described by Edwards and Cable (2009) for demonstrating a congruence effect (i.e., the three key features of the response surface). The first feature is the curvature along the incongruence line ( $E = -S$ ). To support a congruence effect (i.e., Hypothesis 1), the curvature along the incongruence line ( $E = -S$ ) must be negative and significant (resulting in an inverted  $u$ -shaped relationship along the incongruence line), such that values for employee balance satisfaction decrease when values for employee FWC or WFC ( $E$ ) and SO FWC or WFC ( $S$ ) deviate from each other in either direction. We tested this feature by examining whether the curvature along the incongruence line (the line where  $E = -S$  and calculated as  $b_3 - b_4 + b_5$ ) was negative and significant.

The second feature of the response surface is the ridge (or peak) where values for the criterion variable are maximized. To provide further support for a congruence effect (i.e., Hypothesis 1), the ridge of the response surface should run along the congruence line ( $E = S$ ), such that values for employee balance satisfaction are maximized (at every level of FWC or WFC) when values for employee FWC or WFC ( $E$ ) and SO FWC or WFC ( $S$ ) are congruent. To

<sup>4</sup> To estimate the coefficients and standard errors for the slope and curvature of the congruence ( $E = S$ ) and incongruence ( $E = -S$ ) line of the response surface, we used procedures for testing linear combinations of regression coefficients (Cohen & Cohen, 1983; Edwards & Parry, 1993).

demonstrate that the ridge of the response surface runs along the congruence line ( $E = S$ ), the first principal axis of the response surface should have a slope ( $p_{11}$ ) of 1 and an intercept ( $p_{10}$ ) of 0 (Edwards, 2002; Edwards & Parry, 1993). Empirically assessing the slope ( $p_{11}$ ) and intercept ( $p_{10}$ ) of the first principal axis involves evaluating the significance of a nonlinear combination of our polynomial regression coefficients, and we therefore generated 10,000 bootstrapped samples to estimate 95% confidence intervals (CIs) for  $p_{11}$  and  $p_{10}$  (Edwards, 2002; Edwards & Parry, 1993).

The third feature of the response surface is the slope of the congruence line ( $E = S$ ). This feature determines support for Hypothesis 2. Specifically, in order to demonstrate that employee balance satisfaction is higher when an employee and an SO are congruent at a low level of FWC or WFC in comparison to congruence at a high level of FWC or WFC, the slope of the congruence line (the line where  $E = S$  and calculated as  $b_1 + b_2$ ) must be significant and negative.

Testing Hypothesis 3 required additional analyses beyond those described in Edwards and Cable (2009). If there is a significant curvature along the incongruence line (Carter & Mossholder, 2015), following recent empirical work (e.g., Cole, Carter, & Zhang, 2013; Matta et al., 2015), we tested the asymmetrical incongruence effect forwarded in Hypothesis 3 by calculating the lateral shift quantity ( $[b_2 - b_1] / [2 \times (b_3 - b_4 + b_5)]$ ). The lateral shift quantity specifies the magnitude and direction of a lateral shift of the response surface along the incongruence line (Atwater, Ostroff, Yammarino, & Fleenor, 1998), and a negative lateral shift quantity would provide support for Hypothesis 3. To empirically assess statistical significance, we utilized 10,000 bootstrapped samples to estimate 95% CIs for the lateral shift quantity (Cole et al., 2013; Matta et al., 2015). If there is not a significant curvature along the incongruence line, Hypothesis 3 is tested with the slope of the incongruence line (for similar, see Atwater et al., 1998; Lambert, Edwards, & Cable, 2003; Montes & Irving, 2008). Specifically, the slope of the incongruence line (the line where  $E = -S$  and calculated as  $b_1 - b_2$ ) must be negative and significant.

In order to test mediation of the interplay of employee FWC or WFC ( $E$ ) and SO FWC or WFC ( $S$ ) on downstream outcomes via employee balance satisfaction (i.e., Hypotheses 4 and 5), we utilized the block variable approach recommended by Edwards and Cable (2009). Specifically, we estimated the “ $\alpha$ ” and “ $\beta$ ” paths of the mediation model. First, we

multiplied the five polynomial regression coefficients (from Equation 1 above) with the raw data in order to create a weighted linear composite (i.e., block variable) that represents the relationship between the five polynomial terms and the mediator (i.e., employee balance satisfaction). Next, we regressed the mediator (i.e., employee balance satisfaction) on the block variable along with the control variables from the original model. The regression coefficient for the block variable in this analysis represents the “ $\alpha$ ” path of the mediation model (i.e., the effect of the five polynomial terms on the mediator).<sup>5</sup> We note that the variance explained in the mediator (i.e., employee balance satisfaction) by the block variable is exactly equal to the variance explained by the five polynomial terms (Edwards & Cable, 2009; Matta et al., 2015). To estimate the “ $\beta$ ” path of the mediation model, we regressed each downstream outcome (i.e., employee job satisfaction and SO relationship satisfaction) on the mediator (i.e., employee balance satisfaction) after controlling for the five polynomial terms and the control variables. We utilized the materials from Edwards and Lambert (2007) to assess the significance of each indirect effect using 10,000 bootstrapped samples.

## RESULTS

Prior to testing our hypotheses, we examined whether the constructs assessed in our study were distinguishable from each other. In order to do so, we conducted confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs). The results of our first CFA revealed that our proposed seven-factor model (i.e., employee FWC, SO FWC, employee WFC, SO WFC, employee balance satisfaction, employee job satisfaction, and SO relationship satisfaction) fit the data well. Specifically,  $\chi^2(413) = 666.841$  ( $p < .01$ ), CFI = .904, RMSEA = .066, SRMR = .063. Importantly, all indicators loaded

<sup>5</sup> Because all of our polynomial effects (i.e., Hypotheses 1–3) are based on linear combinations of the five polynomial terms, the  $\alpha$  path must be tested by including the overall effect of the five polynomial terms on the mediator (Edwards & Cable, 2009). Indeed, the independent effects of each regression parameter are meaningless for interpreting the mediating effect of congruence without the inclusion of the other terms. For this reason, Edwards and Cable (2009) specifically introduced the block variable approach to test the mediation of congruence effects. Importantly, the block variable approach is a well-accepted procedure in top-tier management outlets (e.g., Carter & Mossholder, 2015; Matta et al., 2015; Wilson, DeRue, Matta, Howe, & Conlon, 2016).

significantly on their corresponding factor. In addition to testing our proposed model, we compared it to every possible constrained model in which any two of the factors were combined. Results revealed that all 21 possible constrained models added significant misfit to the data— $69.500 \leq \Delta \chi^2$ s ( $\Delta df = 6$ )  $\leq 623.352$ .

Means, standard deviations, and correlations are presented in Table 1. The polynomial regression analysis results corresponding to Equation 1 are reported in Model 1 of Tables 2 (FWC) and 3 (WFC), and the resulting surface plots are shown in Figures 1a (FWC) and 1b (WFC). Hypothesis 1a predicted that the more congruence between an employee's level of FWC and an SO's level of FWC, the more satisfied the employee is with his or her work–family balance. As shown in Model 1 of Table 2, the three second-order polynomial terms (i.e.,  $b_3$  employee FWC<sup>2</sup>,  $b_4$  employee FWC  $\times$  SO FWC,  $b_5$  SO FWC<sup>2</sup> or  $E^2$ ,  $ES$ ,  $S^2$ , respectively) were jointly significant in predicting balance satisfaction ( $F = 3.23$ ,  $p < .05$ ), and the surface along the incongruence line curved downward (curvature [ $b_3 - b_4 + b_5$ ] =  $-.60$ ,  $p < .05$ ). To illustrate the combined effects of employee FWC and SO FWC on employee balance satisfaction, Figure 1a depicts the response surface plot. As predicted, the surface along the incongruence line ( $E = -S$ ) follows an inverted *u*-shaped pattern, such that employee balance satisfaction decreased when employee and SO FWC deviate from the congruence line ( $E = S$ ) in either direction. Thus, the results for the first feature of the response surface support Hypothesis 1a.

In regards to the second feature of the response surface (i.e., the slope and intercept of the response surface ridge), we examined whether the principal axis slope ( $p_{11}$ ) = 1.0 and the principal axis intercept ( $p_{10}$ ) = 0. The results of our 10,000 bootstrapped samples for  $p_{11}$  and  $p_{10}$  showed that the first principal axis had a slope ( $p_{11}$ ) that was not significantly different from 1.0 as the 95% CI included 1.0 (.090, 1.357) and an intercept ( $p_{10}$ ) that was not significantly different from zero as the 95% CI included zero (-.113, 1.995). These results suggest that employee balance satisfaction is maximized (at every level of FWC) when employee FWC ( $E$ ) and SO FWC ( $S$ ) were congruent. Thus, overall, our results provided support for Hypothesis 1a.

Hypothesis 1b predicted that the more congruence between an employee's level of WFC and an SO's level of WFC, the more satisfied the employee is with his or her work–family balance. As shown in Model 1 of Table 3, the three second-order polynomial terms

(i.e.,  $b_3$  employee WFC<sup>2</sup>,  $b_4$  employee WFC  $\times$  SO WFC,  $b_5$  SO WFC<sup>2</sup>, or  $E^2$ ,  $ES$ ,  $S^2$ , respectively) were not jointly significant in predicting balance satisfaction ( $F = .47$ , n.s.), and the surface along the incongruence line did not exhibit a downward curvature (curvature [ $b_3 - b_4 + b_5$ ] =  $.19$ , n.s.). The response surface for combined effects of employee WFC and SO WFC on employee balance satisfaction (Figure 1b) also illustrated that the surface along the incongruence line ( $E = -S$ ) did not exhibit the predicted inverted *u*-shaped pattern. Thus, considering that the first feature of the response surface (i.e., the curvature along the incongruence line) is necessary to claim support for a congruence effect (Edwards & Cable, 2009), we failed to find support for Hypothesis 1b.

Hypothesis 2a predicted that employee balance satisfaction is higher when an employee and an SO are congruent at a low level of FWC, in comparison to congruence at a high level of FWC. As shown in Model 1 of Table 2, the slope along the congruence line ( $E = S$ ) was significant and negative (slope [ $b_1 + b_2$ ] =  $-.56$ ,  $p < .01$ ). The response surface in Figure 1a also confirms that employee balance satisfaction was higher in the low–low FWC congruence condition in comparison to the high–high FWC congruence condition. Thus, the results pertaining to the third feature of the response surface described above support Hypothesis 2a.

Although no direct congruence effects were found for WFC (due to the lack of curvilinear effects derived from the second-order polynomial terms—i.e.,  $b_3$  employee WFC<sup>2</sup>,  $b_4$  employee WFC  $\times$  SO WFC,  $b_5$  SO WFC<sup>2</sup>, or  $E^2$ ,  $ES$ ,  $S^2$ ), we are still able to test the remainder of the hypotheses, since they rely on the linear effects derived from the first-order polynomial terms ( $b_1$  employee WFC,  $b_2$  SO WFC). Hypothesis 2b predicted that employee balance satisfaction is higher when an employee and an SO are congruent at a low level of WFC, in comparison to congruence at a high level of WFC. As shown in Model 1 of Table 3, the slope along the congruence line ( $E = S$ ) was significant and negative (slope [ $b_1 + b_2$ ] =  $-.69$ ,  $p < .01$ ). The response surface in Figure 1b also confirms that employee balance satisfaction was higher in the low–low WFC congruence condition in comparison to the high–high WFC congruence condition. Thus, the results pertaining to the third feature of the response surface described above support Hypothesis 2b.

Hypothesis 3a predicted that employee balance satisfaction is lower when an employee has a higher level of FWC than an SO as compared to when an SO

TABLE 1  
Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Gender	0.70	0.46	—									
2. Number of children	2.13	1.40	-0.12	—								
3. Marital status	0.08	0.27	0.14	-0.12	—							
4. Employee FWC (employee-rated)	2.05	0.65	0.05	-0.01	0.04	(0.77)						
5. SO FWC (SO-rated)	1.97	0.64	0.05	0.04	-0.06	0.16	(0.76)					
6. Employee WFC (employee-rated)	3.12	0.85	0.18*	0.00	0.15	0.30**	0.18*	(0.75)				
7. SO WFC (SO-rated)	2.99	0.87	0.08	-0.08	0.02	0.27**	0.38**	0.13	(0.78)			
8. Balance satisfaction (employee-rated)	3.39	0.90	-0.17*	0.04	-0.10	-0.36**	-0.15	-0.56**	-0.20*	(0.94)		
9. Employee job satisfaction (SO-rated)	3.37	0.89	-0.03	0.09	0.02	-0.16	-0.19*	-0.18*	-0.24**	0.44**	(0.91)	
10. SO relationship satisfaction (SO-rated)	4.17	0.77	-0.06	0.07	0.07	-0.08	-0.29**	-0.08	-0.23**	0.22**	0.28**	(0.94)

Notes:  $n = 141$  for all variables. SO-rated = significant other-rated. Gender coded such that 0 = male and 1 = female. Marital status is coded such that 0 = married and 1 = not married. Coefficient alphas are reported on the diagonal.

\*  $p < .05$

\*\*  $p < .01$

**TABLE 2**  
**Polynomial Regressions of Balance Satisfaction and Downstream Outcomes on FWC Congruence**

Variables	Balance Satisfaction (Employee-rated)	Employee Job Satisfaction (SO-rated)		Significant Other Relationship Satisfaction (SO-rated)	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Constant	3.42** (0.09)	3.42** (0.10)	1.96** (0.31)	4.07** (0.08)	3.47** (0.28)
<i>Controls</i>					
Gender	-0.32* (0.15)	-0.04 (0.16)	0.09 (0.15)	-0.08 (0.14)	-0.02 (0.14)
Number of children	0.01 (0.05)	0.07 (0.05)	0.06 (0.05)	0.03 (0.05)	0.02 (0.04)
Marital status	-0.18 (0.25)	0.13 (0.27)	0.21 (0.25)	0.23 (0.24)	0.27 (0.24)
<i>Polynomial terms</i>					
$b_1$ Employee FWC ( $E$ )	-0.52** (0.12)	-0.20 (0.13)	0.03 (0.13)	-0.10 (0.11)	-0.01 (0.12)
$b_2$ Spouse FWC ( $S$ )	-0.05 (0.12)	-0.16 (0.13)	-0.14 (0.12)	-0.36** (0.11)	-0.35** (0.11)
$b_3 E^2$	0.01 (0.11)	-0.04 (0.11)	-0.04 (0.10)	0.10 (0.10)	0.10 (0.10)
$b_4 E \times S$	0.40* (0.16)	0.23 (0.17)	0.06 (0.16)	0.07 (0.14)	0.00 (0.15)
$b_5 S^2$	-0.21 <sup>†</sup> (0.12)	-0.17 (0.13)	-0.08 (0.12)	0.06 (0.11)	0.10 (0.11)
<i>Mediator</i>					
Balance satisfaction			0.43** (0.09)		0.18* (0.08)
<i>Variance explained</i>					
$R^2$	0.22	0.08	0.23	0.11	0.15
$\Delta R^2$	0.22*	0.08	0.15**	0.11*	0.03*
<i>Congruence line (<math>E = S</math>)</i>					
Slope ( $b_1 + b_2$ )	-0.56** (0.16)	-0.35* (0.17)		-0.46** (0.14)	
Curvature ( $b_3 + b_4 + b_5$ )	0.21 (0.18)	0.02 (0.19)		0.23 (0.16)	
<i>Incongruence line (<math>E = -S</math>)</i>					
Slope ( $b_1 - b_2$ )	-0.47* (0.18)	-0.04 (0.19)		0.26 (0.17)	
Curvature ( $b_3 - b_4 + b_5$ )	-0.60* (0.25)	-0.44 (0.27)		0.09 (0.23)	
<i>F for the 3 second-order terms</i>	3.23*	1.08		0.89	

Notes:  $n = 141$ . Unstandardized regression coefficients and standard errors are reported. SO = significant other. Gender coded such that 0 = male and 1 = female. Marital status is coded such that 0 = married and 1 = not married. Model 1 represents the effect of our polynomial terms on balance satisfaction ( $\alpha$  path in the mediation model). Models 2 and 4 represent the total effect of the polynomial terms on our downstream dependent variables ( $\tau$  path in the mediation model). Models 3 and 5 represent the effect of the mediator on the downstream dependent variables controlling for the effect of the polynomial terms ( $\beta$  path in the mediation model).

<sup>†</sup>  $p < .10$

\*  $p < .05$

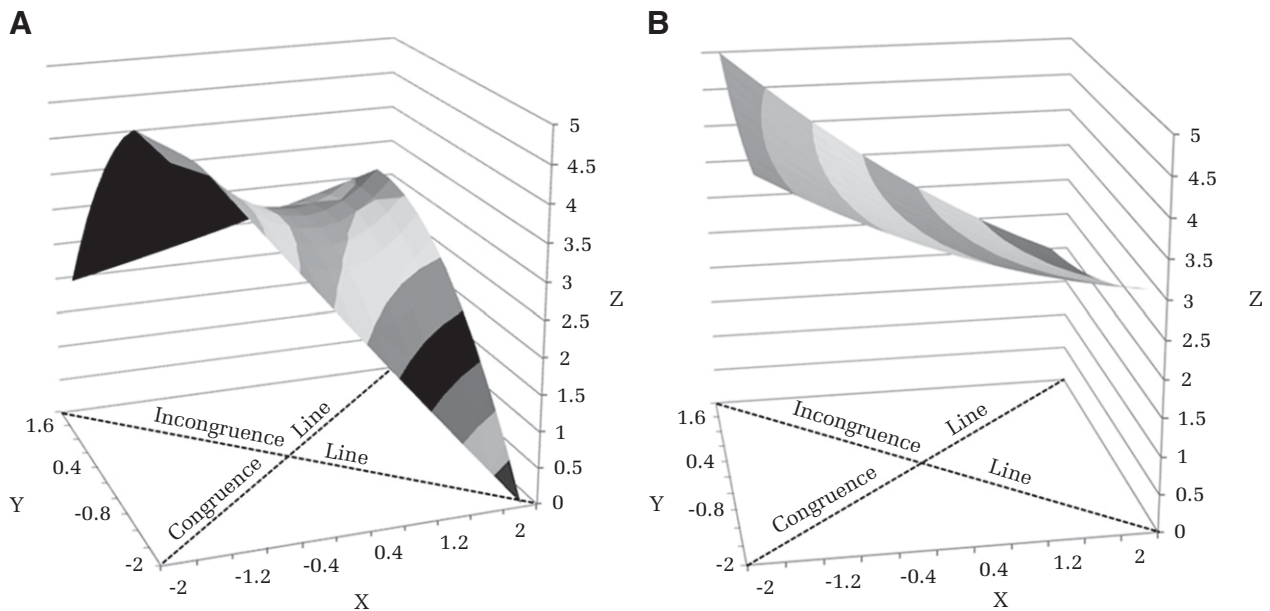
\*\*  $p < .01$

has a higher level of FWC than an employee. Because of the significant curvature along the incongruence line (i.e., support for Hypothesis 1a), support for this hypothesis requires a negative lateral shift quantity (Carter & Mossholder, 2015). As predicted in Hypothesis 3a, the lateral shift quantity was negative ( $-.39$ , 95% CI =  $-1.634, -.054$ ). We also note that, as shown in Model 1 of Table 2, the slope along the incongruence line ( $E = -S$ ) was significant and negative (slope [ $b_1 - b_2$ ] =  $-.47$ ,  $p < .05$ ), providing additional evidence that employee balance satisfaction decreased along the incongruence line—moving from low employee FWC and high SO FWC to high employee FWC and low SO FWC. Our prediction was also consistent with the response surface in Figure 1a, which confirms that employee balance satisfaction was higher in the low employee FWC

and high SO FWC congruence condition in comparison to high employee FWC and low SO FWC congruence condition. Therefore, our results provide support for Hypothesis 3a.

Hypothesis 3b predicted that employee balance satisfaction is lower when an employee has a higher level of WFC than an SO, as compared to when an SO has a higher level of WFC than an employee. In contrast to Hypothesis 3a, because no curvature was found along the incongruence line (i.e., no support for Hypothesis 1b), support for Hypothesis 3b requires the slope of the incongruence line to be negative (for similar, see Atwater et al., 1998; Lambert et al., 2003, 2012; Montes & Irving, 2008). As shown in Model 1 of Table 3, the slope along the incongruence line ( $E = -S$ ) was significant and negative (slope [ $b_1 - b_2$ ] =  $-.47$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Therefore, employee balance satisfaction decreased

**FIGURE 1**  
**Congruence and Incongruence Effects of Employee and SO Interrole Conflict with Employee Balance Satisfaction**



**1A. Congruence and Incongruence Effects for Employee and SO FWC.**

Note: X-axis is centered employee FWC. Y-axis is centered SO FWC. Z-axis is employee balance satisfaction.

**1B. Congruence and Incongruence Effects for Employee and SO WFC.**

Note: X-axis is centered employee WFC. Y-axis is centered SO WFC. Z-axis is employee balance satisfaction.

along the incongruence line—moving from low employee WFC and high SO WFC to high employee WFC and low SO WFC. Additionally, the response surface in Figure 1b confirms that employee balance satisfaction was higher in the low employee WFC and high SO WFC condition, in comparison to high employee WFC and low SO WFC condition. Thus, our results provide support for Hypothesis 3b.<sup>6</sup>

To test employee balance satisfaction as a mediator of the effect of the interplay of employee FWC or

<sup>6</sup>In addition to the curvature and slope of the incongruence line and the slope of the congruence line (i.e., the features of the response surface relevant to our tests of Hypotheses 1–3), we note that our results show a lack of a significant curvature along the congruence line. This indicates that there is no curvilinear effect as one moves along the congruence line from low–low FWC or WFC to high–high FWC or WFC. In other words, for both FWC and WFC, as one moves from low–low FWC or WFC to high–high FWC or WFC, there is a purely linear negative relationship (due to the negative slope; i.e., support for Hypothesis 2) and no curvature—such that employee balance satisfaction decreases as dyads move from low–low FWC or WFC to high–high FWC or WFC.

WFC (*E*) and SO FWC or WFC (*S*) on downstream outcomes (i.e., Hypotheses 4 and 5), we estimated the “ $\alpha$ ” and “ $\beta$ ” paths of the mediation model using the block variable approach recommended by Edwards and Cable (2009). Models 3 and 5 of Tables 2 (FWC) and 3 (WFC) summarize the results of regressing each of our outcome variables (i.e., employee job satisfaction and SO relationship satisfaction) on employee balance satisfaction, controlling for the five polynomial terms and the control variables. The bootstrapping results estimating and assessing the significance of the indirect effects of the interplay of employee FWC or WFC (*E*) and SO FWC or WFC (*S*) with each outcome via employee balance satisfaction are reported below.

Hypothesis 4a predicted that employee balance satisfaction mediates the relationship between the interplay of employee and SO FWC and employee job satisfaction. Results of the bootstrapping analysis support Hypothesis 4a, as the indirect effect of the interplay of employee FWC (*E*) and SO FWC (*S*) with employee job satisfaction via employee balance satisfaction was .428 (95% CI = .247, .635). Hypothesis 4b predicted the same relationship with the interplay of employee and SO WFC. Results of the

**TABLE 3**  
**Polynomial Regressions of Balance Satisfaction and Downstream Outcomes on WFC Congruence**

Variables	Balance Satisfaction (Employee-rated)	Employee Job Satisfaction (SO-rated)		Significant Other Relationship Satisfaction (SO-rated)	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Constant	3.32** (0.10)	3.33** (0.12)	1.75** (0.33)	4.09** (0.11)	3.44** (0.31)
<i>Controls</i>					
Gender	-0.11 (0.14)	0.07 (0.17)	0.12 (0.15)	-0.07 (0.14)	-0.05 (0.14)
Number of children	0.00 (0.04)	0.05 (0.05)	0.05 (0.05)	0.02 (0.05)	0.02 (0.05)
Marital status	0.01 (0.24)	0.22 (0.28)	0.22 (0.25)	0.29 (0.25)	0.30 (0.25)
<i>Polynomial terms</i>					
$b_1$ Employee FWC ( $E$ )	-0.58** (0.08)	-0.19* (0.09)	0.08 (0.10)	-0.09 (0.08)	0.02 (0.09)
$b_2$ Spouse FWC ( $S$ )	-0.11 (0.07)	-0.23** (0.09)	-0.17* (0.08)	-0.18* (0.08)	-0.16* (0.08)
$b_3 E^2$	0.07 (0.08)	0.04 (0.10)	0.00 (0.09)	-0.01 (0.08)	-0.02 (0.08)
$b_4 E \times S$	-0.09 (0.09)	0.03 (0.11)	0.07 (0.10)	0.05 (0.10)	0.06 (0.10)
$b_5 S^2$	0.04 (0.07)	0.03 (0.08)	0.01 (0.07)	0.11 (0.07)	0.10 (0.07)
<i>Mediator</i>					
Balance satisfaction			0.48** (0.09)		0.20* (0.09)
<i>Variance explained</i>					
$R^2$	0.36	0.10	0.25	0.09	0.12
$\Delta R^2$	0.36**	0.10 <sup>†</sup>	0.15**	0.09	0.03*
<i>Congruence line (<math>E = S</math>)</i>					
Slope ( $b_1 + b_2$ )	-0.69** (0.09)	-0.42** (0.12)		-0.28** (0.10)	
Curvature ( $b_3 + b_4 + b_5$ )	0.02 (0.13)	0.10 (0.15)		0.15 (0.13)	
<i>Incongruence line (<math>E = -S</math>)</i>					
Slope ( $b_1 - b_2$ )	-0.47** (0.11)	0.03 (0.13)		0.09 (0.12)	
Curvature ( $b_3 - b_4 + b_5$ )	0.19 (0.13)	0.03 (0.16)		0.05 (0.13)	
<i>F for the 3 second-order terms</i>	0.47	0.14		1.06	

Notes:  $n = 141$ . Unstandardized regression coefficients and standard errors are reported. SO = significant other. Gender coded such that 0 = male and 1 = female. Marital status is coded such that 0 = married and 1 = not married. Model 1 represents the effect of our polynomial terms on balance satisfaction ( $\alpha$  path in the mediation model). Models 2 and 4 represent the total effect of the polynomial terms on our downstream dependent variables ( $\tau$  path in the mediation model). Models 3 and 5 represent the effect of the mediator on the downstream dependent variables controlling for the effect of the polynomial terms ( $\beta$  path in the mediation model).

<sup>†</sup>  $p < .10$

\*  $p < .05$

\*\*  $p < .01$

bootstrapping analysis support Hypothesis 4b, as the indirect effect of the interplay of employee WFC ( $E$ ) and SO WFC ( $S$ ) with employee job satisfaction via employee balance satisfaction was .477 (95% CI = .315, .678).

Hypothesis 5a predicted that employee balance satisfaction mediates the relationship between the interplay of employee and SO FWC and SO relationship satisfaction. Results of the bootstrapping analysis support Hypothesis 5a, as the indirect effect of the interplay of employee FWC ( $E$ ) and SO FWC ( $S$ ) with SO relationship satisfaction via employee balance satisfaction was .177 (95% CI = .038, .357). Hypothesis 5b predicted the same relationship with the interplay of employee and SO WFC. Results of the bootstrapping analysis support Hypothesis 5b, as the indirect effect of the interplay of employee

WFC ( $E$ ) and SO WFC ( $S$ ) with SO relationship satisfaction via employee balance satisfaction was .197 (95% CI = .050, .367).<sup>7</sup>

### Supplemental Analysis

Although we controlled for gender as a potential confound in our proposed model, we conducted

<sup>7</sup> As suggested by an anonymous reviewer, in order to mitigate some of the concerns over alternative causal orderings, we ran alternative models, placing employee job satisfaction and SO relationship satisfaction as potential mediators and balance satisfaction as the dependent variable. We found no significant congruence effects between FWC or WFC congruence and either employee job satisfaction or SO relationship satisfaction.

a supplemental analysis to rule out its potential role as a moderator of the FWC or WFC congruence to outcome relations. This is important to consider because past research has highlighted gender as a moderator of the relationships between individual-level WFC or FWC and outcomes (e.g., Courtright, Gardner, Smith, McCormick, & Colbert, 2016; Ford et al., 2007; Kossek & Ozeki, 1998). Thus, we ran a supplemental moderated polynomial regression analysis, testing the role of gender as a moderator of the relationships between FWC or WFC congruence and outcomes.

Specifically, we followed the principles of moderated regression by expanding the polynomial regression equation (i.e., Equation 1 from the analysis section) to include a series of interaction terms between gender (denoted by  $G$ ) and each polynomial term (for similar, see Bono & Colbert, 2005; Edwards, 1996; Wilson, DeRue, Matta, Howe, & Conlon, 2016). The resulting equation was:

$$B = b_0 + b_1E + b_2S + b_3E^2 + b_4(ES) + b_5S^2 + b_6G + b_7GE + b_8GS + b_9GE^2 + b_{10}(GES) + b_{11}GS^2 + e \quad (2)$$

The moderating effect is represented by the five coefficients  $b_7$ ,  $b_8$ ,  $b_9$ ,  $b_{10}$ , and  $b_{11}$  as a set. Empirical tests of the moderating effect are conducted by assessing the  $\Delta R^2$  by including the set of five interaction terms in comparison to the initial  $R^2$  from the Equation 1 model. If moderation is supported, follow-up analyses can be conducted to interpret the form of the moderating effect.

We first considered the potential moderating effect of gender on the relationship between FWC congruence and balance satisfaction. When adding the five interaction coefficients to Equation 1, we found no support for the moderating role of gender. Specifically, the inclusion of the five interaction terms in Equation 2 did not explain a significant amount of incremental variance ( $\Delta R^2 = .04$ , n.s.). Next, we considered the potential moderating effect of gender on the relationship between WFC congruence and balance satisfaction. When adding the five interaction coefficients to Equation 1, we also found no support for the moderating role of gender. Specifically, the inclusion of the five interaction terms in Equation 2 did not explain a significant amount of incremental variance ( $\Delta R^2 = .05$ , n.s.).<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> We also conducted moderated polynomial regression analyses to explore number of children as a moderator of the effects of FWC or WFC congruence. The results of these analyses also revealed no significant moderating effects.

## DISCUSSION

The current study advances work–family conflict research by suggesting a more complex approach that considers congruence in employee and SO levels of interrole conflict (FWC and WFC) as an additional factor that is important for satisfaction outcomes beyond each individuals' own level of conflict. We drew from balance theory (Heider, 1958) and used polynomial regression and response surface methodology to explore the notion of dyadic interrole conflict congruence. In support of our theorizing, the results demonstrate that employees report higher levels of balance satisfaction when they experience a greater degree of congruence in FWC with their SO, and higher balance satisfaction is a mediating mechanism through which FWC congruence has positive implications for employee satisfaction at work and SO satisfaction at home. Contrary to what one might conclude from previous research that has failed to consider both partners in a cohabitating dyad, we found that less FWC is not always better for an employee. In fact, our results showed that situations in which both individuals in a couple reported high FWC were actually superior to situations in which only one member experienced high FWC and the other did not. Thus, it appears that “misery loves company” when it comes to FWC, meaning that when an employee experiences a high level of FWC (“misery”), having an SO with a similarly high level of FWC may provide validation and comfort (“company”).

With the introduction of interrole conflict congruence, we are able to attain a richer view of the effects of interrole conflict for employees in a dual-earner relationship. Our arguments, based in balance theory (Heider, 1958), articulate interrole conflict congruence as a balanced state where partners possess similar views related to making sacrifices for work or family. Balanced states hold benefits for the individuals involved, including validation of one's own views (Heider, 1958; Newcomb, 1953). This relates to the notion of social support, which often entails emotional empathy received from another person (Kossek, Pichler, Bodner, & Hammer, 2011). Because partners with greater FWC congruence have similar life experiences in terms of family interfering with work, our results suggest that they may be able to empathize with the needs of their partner. This may potentially even result in a shared willingness to outsource work in the home (e.g., hire out the cleaning, have meals delivered). Further, FWC congruence represents a situation in which partners



share the load in terms of family interfering with work, and thus provide another key aspect of support to one another in the form of tangible assistance in the family domain (Kossek et al., 2011). For heterosexual couples, this aligns with an egalitarian gender role orientation where both individuals in a dual-earner couple embrace the family role (Livingston & Judge, 2008), resulting in a more equal division of household work (e.g., cooking, caring for children). Support from one's SO in these various forms should increase one's feelings of having adequate resources, and thus perceptions of balance satisfaction (Valcour, 2007).

The present investigation also contributes to our understanding of employees' experiences of balance satisfaction, or satisfaction with work–family balance. The concept of work–family balance is referenced often in organizations and practice, but research has struggled with how to approach this construct (Maertz & Boyar, 2011; Wayne et al., 2017). In particular, the relationship between work–family conflict and work–family balance has been unclear (Greenhaus & Allen, 2011), and the current study suggests that one reason for this is the complexity of the relationship; namely, that interrole conflict congruence should be taken into consideration along with one's level of interrole conflict when relating to balance satisfaction. Our findings provide support for conceptualizing work–family balance as an employee's perception of fit between him- or herself and the environment (Voydanoff, 2005). Maertz and Boyar (2011: 75) endorsed “a complex, contingent fit perspective” for approaching work–family balance, where balance increases when one's effort and actions fit with both personal values and the environment. Our study adds to this perspective by suggesting that an SO's interrole conflict is an important factor in the environment that an employee may assess fit with when determining balance satisfaction, and greater FWC congruence with one's SO would increase fit with one's family role. We believe continued study of specific factors that bring about feelings of fit, and therefore balance, will be important for further developing an understanding of work–family balance. Finally, the present research contributes to literature on the outcomes of balance satisfaction, which have been understudied thus far (Wayne et al., 2017), by again utilizing a balance theory lens to understand the relationships between interrole conflict congruence and satisfaction at work and home through employees' balance satisfaction.

Interestingly, for the work-to-family direction of interrole conflict congruence, we did not find

support for our initial hypothesis (Hypothesis 1b) that more WFC congruence would relate to higher employee balance satisfaction. The divergent results for dyadic interrole conflict congruence in terms of WFC versus FWC highlight important implications for dyadic work–family research going forward. Specifically, dyadic studies should pay close attention to the shared domain of the individuals in the dyad as it may carry more relevance for shaping perceptions and attitudes. For significant others, family is the shared domain. Because FWC originates in the family domain (given the definition and directional nature of FWC, as well as the various family-related antecedents associated with FWC [e.g., family support, family stress, number of children] [Byron, 2005]), it may be more salient when considering congruence with an SO who shares that domain with the employee. In some ways, this would be consistent with a source attribution perspective where cognitive appraisal and psychological attention are more focused on the originating domain (Shockley & Singla, 2011). Other dyadic work–family research may focus on dyads who share the work domain, such as coworkers. In this case, factors from the work domain may become more dominant. In fact, WFC congruence may be more salient for balance satisfaction judgments when considering congruence with a coworker from one's work group. More broadly, our differing results for WFC and FWC emphasize that future dyadic interrole conflict research should study the two directions of conflict as distinct phenomena. As Netemeyer and colleagues (1996) noted, many general measures of interrole conflict exist; however, considering the differences in our study findings for Hypothesis 1, we recommend the use of directional interrole conflict measures in dyadic work–family research. We did find support for all remaining hypotheses for both WFC and FWC. In terms of WFC, these results indicate that in couples where both partners experience low WFC, employees report more balance satisfaction than in couples where both partners experience high WFC. Additionally, employees perceive more balance satisfaction when their level of WFC is lower, rather than higher, than their SOs' WFC.

Given the importance placed on gender as a key moderating variable in past models of interrole conflict (e.g., Courtright et al., 2016; Ford et al., 2007; Kossek & Ozeki, 1998), we ran supplemental analyses to test the moderating role of gender on the relationships between FWC or WFC congruence and balance satisfaction. None of the moderated polynomial regression analyses produced significant

results, indicating that our support for the relationship between FWC congruence and balance satisfaction, as well as our lack of support for the relationship between WFC congruence and balance satisfaction, holds across men and women. As Ford and colleagues (2007) noted, null findings related to gender moderation in interrole conflict models could “be indicative of a diminishing asymmetry between men and women in their work and family responsibilities” (71). Specifically, in our model both women and men found greater balance satisfaction when employees and SOs had similarly high levels of FWC, indicating high levels of family responsibilities for both parties, rather than situations where one partner had higher FWC than the other. However, we are cautious about drawing strong conclusions from these null findings concerning the possible moderating role of gender, and encourage further testing of the role of gender in future interrole conflict congruence models.

### Practical Implications

The present research offers multiple prescriptions for companies, supervisors, and families. First, given the finding that the best condition of FWC congruence occurs when both individuals in a couple report low FWC, organizations might take a more comprehensive approach to managing employees and consider how they can lower FWC for both employees and their SOs. For instance, helping employees locate and afford reliable child care would benefit both individuals in a dual-income partnership, potentially decreasing FWC for both partners. In one study, 95% of respondents reported that employer-sponsored child care enhanced their ability to balance work and family responsibilities (Horizons Workforce Consulting, 2016). This type of benefit may prove to be a more useful resource for employees over individually focused benefits. Additionally, companies that offer grocery and laundry services, as well as house cleaning referrals or discounts, could benefit the employee’s family as a whole and potentially decrease family demands for both partners, thus lowering both partners’ FWC. Finally, organizations should also consider the impact of work events (e.g., evening award dinners or weekend conferences) on employees’ participation in the family role, and consider including SOs in these events so that both partners get to participate (and still spend time) with each other. This aligns with organizations that promote a positive work-family culture, where shared beliefs and values

support integration of employees’ work and family lives (Thompson, Beauvais, & Lyness, 1999).

At the supervisor level, it may be important for leaders to identify those employees who are in situations least favorable for experiencing work-family balance. For dual-earner couples, our results showed that this occurred for employees who had incongruent levels of FWC with their SOs (specifically, higher levels of FWC than their SOs). Supervisors’ use of family-supportive supervisor behaviors (FSSB) relating to emotional support, which involves being aware of employees’ family commitments and situations (Hammer, Kossek, Yragui, Bodner, & Hanson, 2009), may be particularly important for these individuals. In couples with children, these employees may hold the role of “the default parent,” who has primary responsibility for tasks such as scheduling and attending doctor and dentist appointments, as well as school orientations, fundraisers, and other extracurricular activities that may take place during work hours (Blazoned, 2014). Thus, they may especially benefit from flexibility in terms of supervisory instrumental support, another FSSB (Hammer et al., 2009). Altogether, these supervisor behaviors can assist these employees in coping with FWC.

Our results demonstrate the importance of interrole conflict congruence in dual-earner couples for employee job satisfaction and SO relationship satisfaction via employees’ balance satisfaction. Presumably, higher FWC congruence occurs when both individuals in a couple share in family responsibilities. Thus, couples may want to emphasize communication regarding who is fulfilling certain family demands, and employees should be open with their SO if they feel that family demands are distributed unfairly, in an effort to bring about greater FWC congruence. Indeed, communication is an important means by which roles can be clarified (Rizzo, House, & Lirtzman, 1970). The importance of FWC congruence also emphasizes the benefits of an egalitarian gender role orientation in heterosexual couples. An egalitarian approach involves beliefs that women and men should invest equally in the work and home domains (Hochschild, 1989; Livingston & Judge, 2008). In contrast to statistics that show women today still take on a disproportionate amount of housework and childcare (McKinsey & Company, & LeanIn.Org, 2015), research has demonstrated multiple benefits for couples who achieve greater equality in their work and home contributions (Helms, Walls, Crouter, & McHale, 2010). The present research offers further

support for this notion, and emphasizes the benefits of equality, or congruence, in cross-domain experiences, such as FWC.

### **Strengths, Limitations, and Directions for Future Research**

Some of the strengths of this research include, first, the different sources of ratings (employee and SO) at separate time points. Additionally, the diversity in the professions occupied by research participants enhances the generalizability of our results, as well as a design that did not exclude certain types of couples (e.g., cohabitating but not married, same-sex, etc.). Moreover, the use of polynomial regression and response surface methodology allowed us to follow recent recommendations from Krasikova and LeBreton (2012) to model a dyadic theoretical phenomenon using dyadic analytic techniques, and also to examine various combinations of employee and SO interrole conflict simultaneously (i.e., varying degrees of FWC or WFC congruence at varying absolute levels of FWC or WFC). This approach addresses questions that cannot be answered with traditional methods such as difference scores or moderator analysis (Edwards, 2002).

That said, as with all research a number of limitations are important and deserve mentioning. First, while multiple sources of data were used, diminishing concerns related to common method bias (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003), our research design was (for the most part) cross-sectional in nature. Thus, we were unable to test for causality among the variables in our theoretical model. Collecting individual study variables at multiple points in time would have allowed us to more precisely test the causal ordering of these variables (i.e., the notion that changes in interrole conflict congruence will result in changes in job or relationship satisfaction through increased or decreased balance satisfaction). Hence, future research should consider examining interrole conflict congruence across multiple time periods. Also related to study design, while we included one crossover outcome in our model (i.e., SO relationship satisfaction), our study was not able to test a full crossover model examining both partners' experiences (e.g., both partners balance satisfaction and downstream outcomes) as outcomes of dyadic interrole conflict congruence. Although we anticipate the same pattern of effects that we found in the current study, this needs to be empirically tested. We see the integration of interrole conflict congruence and crossover as a fruitful area for future research.

In terms of partners' outcomes resulting from interrole conflict congruence, we recommend that future research expand past balance satisfaction to explore other implications of congruence. The conceptual ambiguity surrounding work–family balance can be viewed as a limitation of the current research. In particular, there has been confusion surrounding the relationship between work–family conflict and work–family balance, and some early studies went so far as to view balance as the absence of conflict (Greenhaus & Allen, 2011), confounding the two constructs. We are encouraged by recent work–family balance research that has elaborated on specific conceptualizations of balance (e.g., Wayne et al., 2017), and we focused specifically on balance satisfaction because of its holistic nature, which enhances its conceptual and operational distinctiveness from interrole conflict. Nevertheless, an important step in establishing additional validity evidence for dyadic interrole conflict congruence is testing relationships with other outcomes in the work and family domains, such as performance, health, and general well-being. We urge future research in this area, and we recommend these studies be conducted with international samples and across different industries in order to further increase the generalizability of results related to dyadic interrole conflict congruence.

Not only should future research consider additional outcomes, but studies might also focus on factors that can lead to interrole conflict congruence in couples. In particular, shared values between partners (e.g., family comes before work) might lead both individuals in a couple to experience greater FWC, as they sacrifice work for family responsibilities, and ultimately more FWC congruence. Relatedly, an antecedent of interrole conflict congruence might be couples' shared values regarding provider role attitudes. Research has demonstrated that couples who view both partners as sharing equally in breadwinning responsibility also divide housework more equally (Helms et al., 2010), which may increase both WFC and FWC congruence.

We also see value in capturing SO interrole conflict from the perspective of the focal employee when exploring the effects of interrole conflict congruence (although this approach may be more susceptible to common method variance). Indeed, as noted by an anonymous reviewer, it is the employee's own perceptions of their conflict and their SO's conflict that likely drive the effects of interrole conflict congruence. While we described in the Methods section why we chose to focus on focal employee ratings of employee conflict and SO ratings of SO conflict,

considering that employee perceptions are more proximal to employee reactions to interrole conflict congruence, we believe future research may find even stronger effects for FWC congruence—and may potentially find effects for WFC congruence—by exclusively examining employee perceptions of both partners' interrole conflict.

## CONCLUSION

While the consideration of an employee's level of interrole conflict remains important for understanding outcomes for the individual, also taking into account dyadic interrole conflict congruence provides a more comprehensive explanation for the relationships between interrole conflict and key outcomes. In terms of FWC, the best scenario continues to be when both individuals in a couple experience low FWC; however, incongruence in FWC complicates the accepted notion that low FWC is always superior. Our research suggests that it can be deceiving to simply conclude that on average low FWC is better. Rather, such a conclusion oversimplifies the story of FWC when it comes to balance satisfaction and its downstream correlates. The effects of employee FWC vary dramatically depending on SO FWC (i.e., low FWC is not necessarily good if one's SO does not also have low FWC; high FWC is not necessarily bad if one's SO also has high FWC). Altogether, the simultaneous consideration of employee and SO interrole conflict via dyadic interrole conflict congruence can advance our understanding of and directions for future interrole conflict research.

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